Interview with Ruth Little

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RUTH LITTLE

Interviewed by: Hope Meyers and Patricia Squire

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Interviewer's Note:

The interview with Ruth Little, edited by Hope Meyers, the principle interviewer, was conducted over a two-year period. Two one-hour segments were taped in Washington, D.C. in 1986 and 1987. Two other segments were recorded by Mrs. Little in July, 1988, and a final segment, with the assistance of Patricia Cody Squire, in August, 1988.

Given the protracted period between the first and final interview segments, the transcript required editing to eliminate repetitions. Certain sections were shifted in the interest of topic sequence and chronology. Nevertheless, the transcript remains faithful in all respects to Mrs. Little's account of her years in China, as a listener of the tapes can verify. Words added or substituted by the editor are bracketed. Mrs. Little has read and approved the final transcript.

An account of Mrs Little's trip through southern China in 1934 (submitted to the National Geographic in 1937) supplements the transcript.

Q: I am about to interview Mrs. L.K. Little, widow of L.K. Little, a noted expert and Chinese scholar. He was, during the time that he was in China, employed by the China Customs Service. At the end of his career he was appointed Inspector General, in which post he

served from 1943 to 1950. He left China with the advent of the Communist government there.

Mrs. Little was also married to a Foreign Service Officer, Horace Smith, and with him went to China in 1929. We will be talking about her early days in China. I am interviewing Mrs. Little while she is staying for a few days in Washington, D.C. The date is November 17, 1986.

LITTLE: I was born in Rutland, Vermont, and at three weeks of age, I came with my mother to Washington, D.C. That was back in 1904. I grew up here. [At] first [I was taken care of by] a black mammy. Then, until the fourth grade, I was taught at home, with Swiss or German governesses. I was at the Potomac School [then located at the corner of 18th and M Streets] from the fourth to the eighth grade. I graduated from Potomac with honors in art. That is the only diploma I have ever received. After my father died in 1919 during the influenza epidemic, I went to several different schools in Washington — to Friends School when it was on I Street, for a year —[and elsewhere]. I'm really ashamed that I attended seven or eight schools and never graduated. I couldn't get a job today!Of course every summer we came up to New Hampshire. We still had our summer place, and that's one of the reasons my schooling was so chopped up. Mother wanted a companion. She would take me out long before school finished for the year, and then I'd get in late the next year because we stayed for the football games that she was rather enthusiastic about. The thing I seemed to be good at was drawing and painting, and I went at one time to Parsons School of Design, but there again I only stayed for half a year. I was never kicked out, but I just didn't go back.

The way Washington is today, you would never know that it used to be just like a small town. Everybody knew everybody else, there was nobody living in Georgetown except in a few big houses. All the small houses had the Negro servants. You could have bought those houses then for fifty cents. Of course now they're all restored

We lived on R Street near Dupont Circle and that was supposed to be a very elegant part of town — over to Sheridan Circle and Massachusetts Avenue. As a small child, I could go out Massachusetts Avenue with the governess, and we were in the country as soon as we got one block beyond Sheridan Circle. There wasn't anything else. It was the same thing crossing the Connecticut Avenue bridge. There were half a dozen houses up there until you passed the Zoo and arrived in Chevy Chase. Well, that's a long way from China. I shouldn't be going back, should I? But that's what it was like in those days.

In some ways I was very fortunate to have had the experience of growing up in Washington — it helped prepare me for diplomatic life. The officers went to Georgetown University [to the School of Foreign Service] and had their instruction there. But the wives had absolutely no instruction whatever. [In Washington] it was a time when we were invited to the White House, and of course we knew most of the young officers who were part of the protocol for the White House. President Coolidge was President then. It was all good experience.

When I was eighteen, I made my debut here. There were only about thirty-eight of us [debutantes]. In those days Washington was a small town, but we were very social, and we were included on every charity board and everything that went on. About two years after I'd made my debut ... Norris Chipman...

Q: I know [about] Norris Chipman, and I know Fanny Chipman.

LITTLE: You know his wife? He was still a bachelor. His family were great friends of my family. He had a dinner party for some of the new Foreign Service officers, graduates of the Georgetown School of Foreign Service. They were all just starting careers in the Service and about to be sent out on their first assignments. At that time there were not more than 800 members of the Service including the consular and diplomatic corps.

Sheldon Mills was going to La Paz, Bolivia, so the party was more or less for him. There were maybe twelve of us at dinner, and Horace Smith came in. He was late. He was supposed to be my dinner partner, so there was a vacant chair next to me when we went in. Well, then he came breezing in the way he did (laughs) and sat down. Shelley Mills was on the other side. By that time Shelley thought I was his girl for the evening, so there was a little . . not disagreement . . but it ended up that Horace was taking me home from the Chevy Chase Club [where we had gone to a dance after dinner] instead of Shelley [laughs].

And so I saw quite a bit of Horace. Within a month we were engaged. We were married a month later and arrived in Peking a month after that. When we announced our marriage and told our friends that we were going to China, they opened their mouths as well as their eyes in amazement to think we had chosen to live that far off. The East Coast was Europe-minded. Everybody who went anywhere went to Europe. I had gone there with my mother when I was very small. We'd driven all around. China was just a large blob on the map that no one knew very much about. We knew even less. I knew absolutely nothing about it. [It] was the last place on earth I expected to go, but I spent twelve years there with Horace. He had decided to go out to Peking as a language officer for two reasons: one, the pay was better — if you succeeded in getting through the two-and-a-half years of study; and two, living was much simpler and easier, with numerous servants available, even with our very small, small salary of $200 plus per month.

Of course when I joined my husband in the Foreign Service, wives were wives. They weren't lawyers and doctors and what a great many women are today. We took up our positions as wives of Foreign Service officers, and it seemed to me our entire life was to be devoted to being the best possible hostess and to assist in every way that you could. A young man goes into the Foreign Service today, and he marries a young woman who is probably an excellent lawyer or an assistant to a lawyer and has a career of her

own. So it's impossible for me to think “what would be the right thing to do” under these circumstances.

My theory is that if a woman has a very good job at home, she should select someone else than a Foreign Service officer, because I think that the main job of a wife for a husband in the Service is to be a second for him — to do whatever is possible. And I would hope that the salaries would be sufficient so that they would not feel the loss of the wife's position or job and the money that she has received for her work.

Horace and I were married at St. Alban's in the Cathedral grounds, just [two] months after we had [met], which is not long enough! We left for New York on our honeymoon for five days. We'd borrowed Mother's Cadillac. The Holland Tunnel had just opened — in 1927, I believe. We were three-quarters of the way through the tunnel when we had a blowout. [Laughter]. You can imagine how we felt — bride and groom and a big car and a blowout in the middle of the Holland Tunnel! And it was only one lane each way then. All the bells rang, and the lights went on and what have you. In two and one-half minutes they had changed the tire and got us out of the tunnel. I don't know how they did it — but they were prepared for that sort of emergency.

We knew that when we got to Peking, Horace would be one of about eight other men who were studying the language. Among them were Edmund Clubb, John Carter Vincent and Hall Paxton. Chad Bassius was there then; he retired and I think went out to Malaya. John Littell and his wife were there while we were, and the Gordon Burkes and John and Becky Mosher — he retired from the Foreign Service. Quite a number of these young students were sons of missionaries or someone who had connections with China so they found the language not as difficult as someone like Horace just coming from the outside with no knowledge of Chinese. Horace had graduated from Swarthmore and had been to Europe with a student group, but he had never studied a word of Chinese. And languages were not his favorite sport. So it was very difficult for him.

We arrived in Peking by train from Tientsin. We had to take a small boat from Japan over to Taku Bar, the port for Tientsin. When we arrived, they were having a locust plague. The locusts were about ten or eleven inches wide — their wingspread — and they flew up onto the boat, which horrified me. We saw little children on shore catching them and we were told the Chinese ate them. That made me feel even worse!

Another unusual thing I had noticed as we were driving through Tientsin: Two Marines [Tientsin was the location of the U.S. Marines barracks in north China] were playing tennis and, four little boys were running around picking up the balls. Well of course I'd never seen anything like that and I thought, “Oh, those lazy bums! Why do they have to have little boys to pick up the balls?” But I found out that was the usual thing, and nothing to be surprised about.

We arrived in Peking a day late because we forgot about the International Dateline. And [from] the legation — they were all legations, no embassy as yet — a whole group had come down to meet us the day before. It was Edmund Clubb who was so smart and realized why we weren't on the train. So he and Mariann were at the station the next day when in we came. And they had Chai Ting who was the Number One coolie — he wouldn't have called himself a “coolie;” he was sort of a “major domo” of the legation — to help with bags and everything.

We stayed at the Wagons-Lits Hotel at first. The thing that really kept me awake at first was the way that the rickshaw coolies who were parked out in front of the Wagons-Lits cleared their throats and spit all night long. That was part of the shock for someone coming from Washington where I had been living. [Laughter]

Q: Did you have to take a great many things with you in preparation for life there?

LITTLE: Well, our wedding gifts were mostly sterling silver because people had wanted to give us something that would last and wouldn't break. So we had no furniture. Everybody

in the legation was very nice to us. [Of course] we had to find a place to live. They were just beginning to supply the students with the main pieces of furniture — so we took a furnished house in one of the Peking Union Medical College compounds for the doctors and their people — nurses, etc., and the foreigners who were connected with the hospital. After our furniture came, we moved into Dr. Maxwell's house in the Peking Union Medical compound.

Q: Where did you get your furniture?

LITTLE: It was made in Peking. It wasn't very beautiful. It was what they called “mission” furniture, I think. We had shipped out our bedroom set — it took a long time to arrive, of course. There was also a furniture man we called the “Walnut Man.” He made some beautiful pieces for different foreigners, so [later] I decided to have a four-part screen made. He brought it to me all finished, except for the four panels.I said, “What about putting some paintings in those four panels?” So he sent in an artist who had a shop that painted different scenes or else made hand-painted wallpaper. I selected a Mongolian hunting scene. [I was afraid] the panels wouldn't look well if they were cut down to size, and he said, “Oh, that's all right” — this all in Chinese — “Don't worry. I will make you proper sized panels.” So about four days later, back he came with these four lovely panels of the exact picture that I had admired!

One of the funniest things was that I had had some money given to me in checks, and I went down to the bank in Washington to a man whom my mother did business with. I asked him what would be the best way to take this money to Peking. And — imagine! — he told me to take it in gold pieces. So I took it in gold pieces. It amounted to about $1,000, I guess. And here was this little bag of gold pieces. When I went to the National City Bank in Peking, the man looked at it and then said, “What's the matter with him? You should have had a check for us. Somebody might have stolen that on the way out.” (laughs) I said, “Well, he was supposed to have been the one to tell me what to do to bring the

money in.” But the exchange fluctuated, and instead of its being worth $1,000, I got about $2,000 for it. It was like interest in the bank.

We lived one year in Dr. Maxwell's house. When he was due to return, we moved our furniture into one of the big Customs houses. The Chinese Maritime Customs headquarters were there, and Sir Robert Hart in his period had built four houses for the staff, the upper echelon. They were in a compound, and they had simply enormous rooms. They said that when the Inspector General [Sir Robert Hart] was asked how he wanted them built, he took a piece of paper and squared it off. So it was just about like that except it did have a center hall and great big verandas across the front.

So we moved in, and then I had my little red-headed baby. It was very fortunate to be living in Peking then because we couldn't have had better facilities. Rockefeller money had built the hospital, and there were European and American doctors. When the baby was born with an inch of red hair, they put it into a little “kewpie” curl, and the nurses were so excited, because of course she had such blonde skin and then this little red head up top. They carried her around to all the wards. I thought, “Oh, Lord. I wonder if she's going to catch everything in the hospital.” (laughs) But she didn't. She got along very well.

A short time later we left the Customs house and moved our family to San Kwan Miaou, which was part of the American legation [compound]. It had been a series of small Chinese shops, which had been done all over as residences. So I lived in this completely restored Chinese house. Next to us was the swimming pool, which one of our very generous FSO's had built. Obviously he had money on the side. He couldn't have done it (laughs) on $220 a month. It was lovely, and just off our little yard and compound. A lot of parties took place there.

Q: Do you remember how many people — non-Chinese that is — there were in Peking at that time? Were there a great many?

LITTLE: No. It was like a little Washington. It was all “social” in Peking. In fact, in the two and one-half years that we were there, I don't remember ever meeting any Chinese, if you can believe it. It was very interesting that there really were no Chinese. The capital had moved to Nanking [where] there were no buildings for the families to live. So the families remained in Peking. The men would go down on the train to Nanking. This was when Chiang Kai-shek first started taking over, and they [the Kuomintang] bombed us while we were in Peking — dropped three bombs on the city. Two of them didn't explode. One exploded on the polo field. It didn't change the way of life at all.

The entertainment in Peking — I remember going several times to the theater, the Chinese theater. Of course, we were the real thing for the Chinese to see because the plays that they put on were all old stories that they were familiar with. So what the people would do was sit and stare at us (laughing). And then there was a movie house that we could go to. And polo of course was very popular — the Tientsin Marines came down to Peking to play. I had a funny experience there, because back during World War I, I had met an Army officer at Fort Bragg, he sat down right in front of me — one of the polo players that had come down from Tientsin. It was rather startling to see someone that you would know.

A [similar] amusing [encounter] began when I was still in Washington. I had a friend who was a Junior Leaguer, Mrs. Ernest Swift, whom I met on the street just before I was going out to Peking. I told her how excited I was to be getting married and going out there. She said, “Oh, that's wonderful and I know it'll be terribly exciting” and so forth. We said goodbye. Later, as I was walking through the lobby of the Peking Hotel I heard a voice say “Hello!” and I turned around and here was Griffie [Swift]. “Why didn't you tell me you were coming?” I asked her, and she replied, “I had no idea I was coming to China.” About a week after I saw her in Washington, her husband said, “I have to go to China for the Red Cross to check on the Yellow River flood victims. Do you want to go with me?” She said, “Yes.” And they had gone directly out, whereas I had not gone directly out. So they were

already ensconced at the Peking Hotel. I was the most amazed person! (laughs) But that was the way with China, you just never knew.

Our minister was MacMurray [John Van Antwerp MacMurray, 1925-29] when we first went out; he was minister, there being no embassies. And then Nelson Johnson [1930-41. The legation was raised to an embassy in 1935] came before we left. So we had these two men. Mahlon Perkins was counselor. Jerry Spiker was also living in the San Kwan Miaou area. And Johnny Mosher, who later left the service.

Q: Were most of these people married, like yourself?

LITTLE: Oh yes. John Carter Vincent wasn't at that time. He said, “My word, this student mess” as they used to call it where the language officers were supposed to be living, “here I'm the only bachelor.” All the rest of them were married; and most of them were having their first baby, just as we were.

We were there two and one-half years, and as I say, we were really so isolated from the Chinese, except servants and the teachers.

Q: How was the language training done?

LITTLE: Well, this is what I'd like to tell you: Ordinarily, they went to the language school, which was mainly for missionaries. But we arrived the first of July and the school was closed. So my husband had five Chinese teachers, for one hour each, every day.

Q: Five?

LITTLE: It's very important because some of the tones are so important in Chinese. Of course this was Mandarin they were studying and they had to write the characters. My husband had to know 3,000 characters at the end of the study period. And it was very important to hear the different voices speak. With only one teacher, he might not have been able to understand the next person that came along. After being there and

studying all that time (I only learned about 300 characters but I learned to speak to the servants in the house, knew what the groceries were called, and so forth), we went down to Shanghai on our way to Canton. We stepped into rickshaws and we could no more make the rickshaw boys understand what we were saying because there were at least 35 different dialects in China. Of all the frustrating things! To study all that time and then not even be able to tell a rickshaw boy where you want to go when you left the area. Of course the educated people all spoke Mandarin, and the written language was all the same. But the pronunciation as between the Cantonese and the Mandarin was just about as different as English and French.

Q: Did your husband have to pass examinations from time to time?

LITTLE: Yes, he did. And he had a hard time with it too. It's not an easy language, (laughing) and I think when you are adults, finished college, it's difficult. He had just finished at Swarthmore. He was not really a linguist; he'd studied German and French in college. But he found Chinese very difficult, and I think a lot of people did. And then to go down to Canton — our next post was Canton — where they all spoke English with us. Except our servants — we had several lots of them; they would come and go.

Q: May I interrupt to ask whether you got to know other non-Chinese diplomatic people? And who were they?

LITTLE: Oh yes. There was of course formal calling. You left your card, the corner turned up. All the entertaining was from one group to the other. It was very interesting because the English had English food — we thought that was very dull, we didn't think much of that. The French had French food — their servants were trained and they trained the servants under them. So you always had national dishes whenever you went to the different legations. And there was a continuous traveling around from one legation to another.

Q: Speaking of travel, did you travel outside of Peking when you were there?

LITTLE: Yes. There was a sort of summer area where people had cottages and if you were lucky enough to have a car, which of course we didn't have, you could drive out or your friends would take you out. Of course we went to the Great Wall. We went there once on a hunting expedition and spent the night in a camp outside the Great Wall. On that expedition we rode donkeys almost up to the foot of the Great Wall, and it was over little paths that seemed to be nothing but rock. Yet these tiny animals were so sure-footed that the guides had told us, “Don't try to guide them.” There was only one thin rope from their mouth that you could hold on to. [The guides] said, “Leave them alone, they'll find their way and they'll be able to step over these stones as long as you just let them pick their own direction.”

I could tell a whole story just about Peking, because there was so much of interest there, especially when you first come and you haven't lived in a foreign country. This was so extremely foreign that every day there was something different and unusual to write about. I wish that I'd kept a diary the way a bright person would have done, but ...

When we first arrived in Peking, there was a wall around the entire city, which I hear has been removed, and there was the big Hatamen Gate; I believe that is still in existence. The railroad station was outside the Legation Quarter, and of course that was where we were met and our luggage taken off the train. The Legation Quarter was pretty much isolated from the rest of the city. The American compound has the legation building and the Marine guard. There was the British compound and their legation, and others. There was no one living in the palaces of the Forbidden City. I didn't realize ... that the Emperor lived long after ... in Peking ... until 1963. He was then in Manchuria.

My first impressions were anything but favorable. Of course the smells were terrible to somebody who hasn't lived in that area. However, it's really surprising how quickly you can become accustomed to things that you said [at first] you couldn't possibly stand. For instance, they [had] these night soil carts that they pushed through the streets when they'd collected the night soil from different houses. There was no plumbing in most of the

Chinese buildings, and the smell would be just ... well, I don't have to describe it, but after a while, [you would] ride along in your rickshaw, you knew it was bad, but it didn't really bother you very much. They used to take these carts out of the city and dump them on the fields, and of course that kind of fertilizer is what makes everybody deathly ill who eats any raw vegetables. So everything we had was thoroughly cooked.

I had a little container of perfume that was mixed with Vaseline. It was a well-decorated little box that someone had given me as a present, and I never went out in the rickshaw that I didn't take it in my pocketbook with me. When the smell of garlic from the runner in front of me got too bad, I could bring that out and sniff it and that sort of helped. But after about three weeks, I got so that nothing bothered me. I've often said that if the smells went along with the voice for those travel pictures, there'd be very few people leaving the comforts of home to go to foreign countries.

I notice that people comment about the weather in Peking — the terrible dust storms. I don't particularly remember having my face covered or anything because of the dust, but the winters were very cold - twenty below zero, I remember, at one time, and it was a very dry cold. But I did have fur coats.

When we moved into San Kwan Miaou, which was the part of the American legation that had been made over from the little shops and things, the rooms were heated with stoves that burned coal balls. If you went to dinner [in the winter] you usually wore a jacket. The end of the room [away from the fire] would be almost like outdoors, so we all had beautiful silk jackets lined with fur, and we needed them! I had a very pretty blue one that I wore for quite a while. It was made of old tribute silk.

One of the [many] interesting characters who was living in Peking when we were there was Roy Chapman Andrews, the adventurer and discoverer of the Peking eggs in Mongolia. These were the dinosaur eggs that a great deal was said about. We went to a movie that he had taken, and he lectured on it. I was sitting next to Dr. Granger (he was

born in Rutland, Vermont, as I was) — he was really the brains of the operation. Afterward, he turned to me and said, “I'd believe every word of it if I hadn't been there myself.” Roy Chapman Andrews was a very good story teller!

I thought Roy Chapman Andrews lived most of the time off in the wilderness, but I saw him [in Peking shortly after that] riding in an open car with a very pretty Russian woman. I said, “Good heavens. I thought he was up in the desert.” “And I was told, “Oh yes, he's up there, but he comes back for the weekends.”

We had visitors all the time, of course, coming to Peking. Everybody who was going around the world would make Peking a stop. An enormous social life.

Q: What about visitations from the State Department or other government ...?

LITTLE: Yes, we did have. Somebody would come out and check on us.

Q: Visits from senators and congressmen from time to time?

LITTLE: One senator came who didn't understand the protocol about the dean of the diplomatic corps, who would be the one to sit on the right of the hostess. The senator and his wife came out, he a very big shot in Washington. And he was invited and he found this foreigner sitting on the right of the host. It was Mahlon Perkins' dinner party, and there were different nationalities, but the man who was the dean, of course, was the one that was honor guest. And this American who came out went through the roof. He said, “Their heads are turned by these foreigners,” and oh boy he couldn't say enough nasty things about us. It was protocol but of course he didn't know — he thought that because he had come out and because he was an important man in Washington, he should have been the guest of honor. So it took quite a bit of explaining there.

We entertained among ourselves. We played bridge. There was a Peking Club. We did not belong to that on our limited salary. We had very little money, but we had good servants.

Let's see: we had three, I believe. We sent to Tientsin to the American Marine Commissary up there for supplies — soap, all of the canned goods and things that came over from the States. I remember the butter coming down almost as soup because there was no refrigeration until it reached us. The ice that we had in the icebox came out of the river and had to be wrapped in paper because it was dirty — you couldn't let any food be anywhere near it. Nobody had freezers — perhaps some did, but we certainly didn't. (laughing)

You got used to it, of course. We had our own rickshaw and rickshaw boy. The first day we were there we took two rickshaws from outside of the Wagons-Lits [Hotel] to go over to Mariann and Edmund Clubb's for dinner. One rickshaw boy was a raggedly-looking soul, but he was so nice and very fast. We kept him the entire time we were in Peking. And of course the other rickshaw man had gotten him for us and had to get “squeeze” from the one that we had kept because we didn't keep this smart aleck. So he would come around every month to collect from this poor rickshaw boy that we had. But we kept him, we bought him a uniform, we bought him a rickshaw. When I left with the baby, there he as at the station with tears streaming down his face and a big bouquet of flowers. I tell you, it just did me in.

I could tell you a whole lengthy story about our experience and the adjustments with the Chinese servants that we had. Someone had told us to get missionaries' servants, and not to get legation ones because they “squeezed” so much. It was the biggest mistake we could have made because they were not trained to do the kind of entertaining that was necessary, even for someone as “low down on the scale” of diplomacy as we were. But we learned the hard way.

But we never met any Chinese, except the teachers. It was a very isolated foreign community. But I think, coming from Washington, it seemed as though we just stepped into another Washington, except that we had all these servants. Sometimes, they made awfully funny mistakes. The cook could read English, apparently. [The first time] I had two or three guests for dinner, I had ordered an ice for dessert. Well, we waited and waited and

waited and no dessert came. Then finally the boy came. Whenever they were upset, they always (makes a hissing noise) drew in their breath. So he came in, and I said, “Where is our dessert? We're sitting here waiting.” And he went back out again and he brought the dessert in. The cook had failed to notice that it said “Freeze.” So it came in in tall glasses! I said, “I think it would be nice if you opened a can of peaches! I think we'd like something like that.” So that was what was upsetting him, that it wasn't frozen, which it should have been.

Well, anyway, we finally finished our delightful stay in Peking. It was just marvelous. And of course everyone that came to China — Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford came, and a lot of interesting people. The diplomatic group more or less as a routine matter met many of these people as they came through — either as personal friends, or officially received. The minister would have a party for them if the people were at all prominent, and so we were usually included. I [remember one] very wonderful party. [The host] was Mr. Engert. He lived in Washington as head of the English-Speaking Union. He came out from Europe. Everybody sent out printed invitations for dinner, because there were so many dinners, and that was the way you entertained. That was really the only entertainment — playing bridge, or entertaining in your home. So in this instance, the Engerts sent out this third person invitation. We were used to that, there, but nobody ever dressed formally - the men usually wore black tie unless there was some visiting official when it was necessary to get all dressed up in tails. Horace, my husband, was studying as a language officer and not going into the legation offices, but one of the second secretaries happened to see Mr. Engert over there, and he said, “Oh I suppose it's black tie.” And Engert said, “No, of course not. It's very clear from the invitation it's white tie.” So of course they were all prepared, but the poor little language officers, as we were, did not go into the legation often because we did all our studying and everything at home. I felt this was very informal — eight o'clock, when most of the dinner parties were [at eight-thirty]. So we arrived and, my word, everybody had passed the word around in the office [and they were] all dressed up in their white ties. Horace was in his black tie.

Well, I said, “Maybe they'll think we just don't have any!” (laughter) We went to dinner, and he apologized for not being dressed formally, apparently the way Mr. Engert had expected. We had one round of drinks which the boys passed around on a tray, and we waited and we waited and we waited. Usually you had about 15 minutes for that one drink and then you went in and sat down for dinner. Finally, in rushed a man from the Italian Legation. He apologized for being so late. He was a friend of ours. It was Marco Calamai (his brother was the captain of the Andrea Doria, the ship that went down off the Atlantic Coast). Marco was the Naval Attach# for the Italian Legation.

Tea was [always] served at ten o'clock and then the guest of honor was supposed to leave so that everybody else could go home. [Marco] left at the same time with us. We said, “Well, whatever happened to you? You were the one that held up the whole dinner party.” He said, “I had on black tie. I saw all these people in white tie and I rushed home and changed.” I thought afterwards it would have been much better if he'd just gone in but of course this was an American party and he was a foreigner and naturally he wanted to be sure. — “Oh,” he said, “if I'd seen Horace, I wouldn't have gone back. I didn't see anything but white ties.” He only had a rickshaw, so he had to tear home and get his clothes changed and back, but while the rest of us sat around there waiting.” (laughs) It's one of those silly things that would happen in Peking.

Well, I could go on indefinitely ... Helen Burton was there, and she had just started her shop, the Camel's Bell, in the Peking HoteShe was a girl who had come out there as a secretary. She first started making candy, and she got permission to have a little glass case in the front entrance of the Peking Hotel. The last time I saw her, which was ... about ten years later ... she had a whole wing of the Peking Hotel. You know, I could go on forever talking about Peking!

Our first post was Canton. We were there for four years. Joe Ballantine was our consul general when we arrived ... Jerry Spiker came after the Ballantines. He had just been married to Helen, up in Peking. (He was a bachelor when we were there.) He didn't like

the idea that the Foreign Service was being combined so that the diplomatic and consular officers were one group. He was th“old school,” and he thought it was terrible to have consular people get the same privileges (laughs) as the diplomatic corps did. So he wasn't very happy when he was sent down as consul general to Canton.

That was in the Depression, and all of our salaries were cut. By that time we were getting a little more than we had when we started. [Even so] I started making chocolates and selling them — just to make a little extra money.

Q: To whom did you sell? They must have been very good.

LITTLE: To the whole island [Shamien]. It was just — I was doing this in the kitchen and sent it out. We had servants, of course.Then I went [to the States where] my second baby was born. This was when we found out how bad things were [back home due to the Depression]. The Canton climate is very difficult. Horace was due for leave in August, and the baby was due in August, so we thought the best thing for me to do was take the two-year-old and go home, and then he would meet me there. I would go to his family out in Ohio, because [my] mother had had very serious financial reverses. People were jumping out of windows here and all sorts of dreadful things, and she lost a good deal of what she had. So I was to go out to Ohio to have my second baby.

I left from Hong Kong, went through the Suez Canal and was five weeks or more on the boat, very pregnant. Everybody thought the baby would probably arrive on the ship. And the doctor on board was a throat specialist, so you can imagine, everybody was nervous whether I'd make it to New York (laughs). Well, we made it to New York, but four days before, a cable came saying that Horace's leave had been canceled for one year. So I went out to Ohio, had the baby there, and then, when she was nine weeks old, got on a train — she was in a basket — with the two-year-old. There were no planes then, this was in 1932. I crossed the country and then took the Dollar Line back to Canton.

Q: How long did that ocean trip take?

LITTLE: Ten days to Japan. We stopped just for one day in Hawaii, then went on. I've forgotten the one we were on — I've been back and forth several times on the President or Dollar Line. We had some quite exciting times. The captain slept with a gun under his pillow because — we were forced to take a so-called “American” crew, and we had left Hawaii with a group of Chinese. Usually most of the Dollar Line had Chinese crew on board. Then a law [was passed in] Washington. They were mailboats and they had to have American crews.

So this American crew, while half of them couldn't speak English, they were Americans. We were taking the Chinese crew back to China, so they were going as steerage passengers. The so-called American crew behaved so badly that the captain put them off in Hawaii, said he wouldn't take them any further. And the Chinese crew on board that was being returned to China jumped in and cleaned the whole place up. He said it was the dirtiest engine room ... all that section, they cleaned it all up.

We got out of Hawaii and I looked at what they called Bird Island as we passed it and I saw it first on one side, then on the other side of the ship. They said, “Haven't you heard? We're turning around, we have to go back to Honolulu and we have to take back the American crew and give up the Chinese crew.” So, I'll tell you, it was anything but a pleasant voyage. This crew were rude, it was very unpleasant. Anyway we got back to China. I met Horace in Japan and then we went down to Hong Kong and up to Canton. As I said, we had four years in Canton. And that was when we had a marvelous trip through the interior. Mr. Ballantine, the consul general, was going back on leave and Jerry Spiker was to come down to take his place. In the interim, we had a consul [who was] in charge.

Horace had been very anxious to see some of the interior of China that was part of our consular district. That included Yunnan Fu — we did have an officer there, Kwaiyang and Kwaichow had never been visited, though it was part of our area. So Horace said, “Well,

let's take a trip up there." And of course Mr. Fletcher, who was not a China service man, thought maybe that was a good idea. "We can't pay for your trip, but we can give you the time."

Reginald Bragonier, the Vice Consul, and his wife Catherine, were in Canton then. They of course had served elsewhere and had just arrived there, and she was very anxious to go. They couldn't let two officers go off, so Horace and Catherine and I and a Chinese doctor, who spoke English and also Mandarin, became the traveling party. We took one servant with us, and this boy spoke Mandarin. As part of the trip we took two weeks by chair, [on what] used to be the old Imperial Highway, from Peking to Yunnan Fu (now they call it Kunming). In the early days if a Chinese were out of favor in Peking, he would be shipped down on this highway all the way down to South China. So since there was a highway, there was a constant stream of horses and chair bearers, coolies — people going from north to south and back.

The interesting thing was that all along that highway, which was like a footpath through Rock Creek, or a bridle path that could carry horses, they spoke Mandarin. And there were villages that grew up every one day's march, and there Mandarin was spoken. But twenty miles away on either side they were speaking their own dialect. But because of the traffic going from north to south, in the little villages that had sprung up they were all able to speak or understand a sort of garbled Mandarin, which was supposed to be the official language.

We had to take all of our supplies with us. We couldn't depend on food along the way because we were scared to death of getting sick. We divided up the food so we had one day's food in each container. Of course everything had to be canned, there being no ice, and we had to get great jugs to carry water. There were few places where we felt it was safe, where streams came out of a hill and were safe to drink. So we had an enormous amount of luggage — everything needed for the four of us. [We had to have a letter to each one of the many warlords who had complete control of their area] because they didn't

recognize Chiang Kai-shek's government in Nanking. You were dependent on their good will in coming through [their territory].

For a full account of the journey, consult the manuscript written for the National Geographic by Ruth and Horace Smith in 1937.

We were gone seven weeks. [When we finally arrived back in Yunnan Fu] I had lost ten pounds.Catherine Bragonier and I spent several more days in Yunnan Fu. There was a fascinating man from the Hawaiian Islands, a Dr. Locke, who was studying the plants and flowers of that part of China. I had collected samples of plants along the way and was delighted to have him tell me about them. Many varieties we find in our gardens at home came originally from China.

Horace decided to stay on another week, so Catherine, Dr. Lau and I took the three-day train trip to Hanoi. It was a fantastic trip. The railway was built when the French occupied northern Indo-China. It was considered one of the wonders of the world. Well, it was extremely dangerous to travel after dark through the mountains because of possible landslides along the way. The train stopped each night at a station with accommodations for the passengers. We got off, and the train waited until morning. We slept in bunk beds in the railroad station and took off again the next morning.

The train would travel along one side of a ravine, then through a tunnel onto a bridge crossing the ravine and disappear into a tunnel on the other side until we were out in the open and [could look] directly across the tracks we had just negotiated. It was a trip to remember, and we were quite relieved to spend the nights in the few stations along the way.

I don't remember too much about Hanoi, except wide streets and trees. Someone from the consulate had given us a French English-speaking lady to show us around. [As we were] walking down the sidewalk, a large centipede crossed in front of us and she put her foot on it to kill it. Both ends curled over her shoe — that was how long it was. I have never gotten

over my dislike of “creepy crawley” things. The scorpions in Peking, the flying cockroaches in Canton always gave me a sense of horror. Years later on a cruise I put a five-year-old boa constrictor around my shoulders and was not in the least bit disturbed. I have a picture to prove it!

Speaking of scorpions, after we moved into the San Kwan Miaou house in the legation in Peking — our fourth home — I found four scorpions wandering around the bathroom and dropped them one by one with my curling iron — the kind you heat in a lamp — into the toilet. By that time I was almost hysterical and sent a coolie over to get Horace who was studying with one of the other language students. There wasn't anything he could do but [try to] calm me down. They [scorpions] loved to get into your shoes, so it was automatic to knock your shoes on the floor before putting them on.

After two days in Hanoi we went on to Haiphong. There we took a Butterfield and Swire boat that was a freighter that went up and down the coast of China and had an English crew. Butterfield and Swire was a big English company with a good many interests in China. There were only a few cabins for passengers. Most of [them] were Chinese — what you might call deck people — who slept on the deck because it was so unpleasant down in the hold where they were supposed to have their accommodations.

Unfortunately, on this trip, the ship was carrying pigs to China. When they put the pigs — there were about three hundred of them — on the ship, they put each one in a wicker basket that was just the size of the pig, and they piled these wicker baskets one on top of the other on the deck. The pigs had been doped so that they would supposedly sleep for the two or three days on the ship. Well, the poor passengers who had little money and were looking for jobs [had] to put their bedding on top of those piles of pigs and sleep there — for what sleep they could get!

They even had other animals — they had frogs in a big vat, and a cage of monkeys. When we got to Hainan Island, they took on a lot of water buffalo that were being shipped up to

Canton and the mainland to be used in the rice paddies. They were brought out in small Chinese boats — junks — and lifted onto the front deck of our ship by basket derrick and fastened there. There were about 70 of them. The sea was so rough we could not go into the harbor, so they were brought out.

We couldn't go out on our deck — the stench was so awful. Unfortunately, the ship had gone through a typhoon further south, and there were still remnants of the bad weather coming up the coast. So the ship was tossing back and forth [so badly] that we had to be strapped to our bunks at night to keep from falling out of bed. The trip, which ordinarily took two days, took four days to reach Hong Kong. We played bridge with the officers off duty, and I eventually went into the galley and made fudge on one occasion when the sea had quieted down.

Catherine's husband Reg was on hand to meet us in Hong Kong. They had come out to Canton as newlyweds, and he held her in his arms until the ship was almost unloaded. I wonder how many of those pigs were still alive! We took the train up to Canton and Horace arrived about a week later after his [longer] stay in Yunnan, with interesting trips around the area including a Buddhist monastery. He brought home a leopard skin and an enormous straw Mao hat as souvenirs of the trip.

[I should say that] our seven-week trip into the interior was an extremely dangerous one. If any China service man had been in charge of the consulate in Canton, we never would have had permission to take it. Mr. Fletcher, who had never been in China before, gave us permission to make it. But when Jerry Spiker, who was an old China Hand arrived later, after we had returned, he was absolutely horrified, because he said that there was no reason on earth why [we] shouldn't have been taken by bandits. And he said the U.S. government couldn't have done anything about us, really, without sending the army and the navy and the marine corps in.

Canton was the only place that we really got to know the Chinese. Mr. Ballantine, our consul general, decided that he would give no dinner parties, big parties, for the foreign group that lived on Shamien [Island] without including a fair number of Chinese officials. Of course a great many Cantonese had been to England and the United States to study, so [they] spoke English. The wives didn't. They had stayed home, most of them, and they didn't speak a word of English. So I was the one who had to talk to them! And entertain them. It was easy because they were crazy about anything to do with children, you see — they wanted to see their clothes and their bedding and everything else. So when they came over for us to entertain them, it wasn't difficult for me and I with my smattering of Chinese was able to carry it off.

But most of the officials knew English. And of course Hong Kong, being [under the] English, a lot of them were very good at it. I managed — I used my awful, garbled Chinese but still I would get across. I was fine — I wasn't a bit self-conscious; as long as I could make these Chinese ladies understand what I was trying to say, I didn't care whether I was correct or not. But if someone (there was one wife down there when we were) would criticize my Chinese, I would just curl up and feel as though I didn't want to speak it. But the Chinese were so polite, if they could just understand what you were trying to say, they didn't care whether you were saying it correctly or not.

Q: Before Mr. Ballantine started entertaining Chinese, had that not been done?

LITTLE: No, it had not been done. The British had kept very aloof. Obviously the men had entertained the Chinese; there was always that arrangement. But there were none of the sort of social gatherings when Chinese would be invited to bring their wives. It was all sort of official. But the Ballantines insisted that there be a certain number of Chinese at every party they had. Which was very nice of them. The British saw that the Americans were getting ahead of them, so they changed their system and they began inviting the Chinese to these parties. So that was quite interesting.

But it was so different in those days, you see. There was very little reciprocal relation. But in our day, we were entertained by many Chinese. We went to funerals and weddings and had all sorts of interesting experiences in Canton. So the British began to do exactly the same thing. It was really Mr. Ballantine, however, who'd been in Japan — he was really a Japanese service man, he could read — Chinese and Japanese characters are very similar, so that if you've studied one, you could make out with the other.

At the end of four years in Canton (1931-1935), we got word that our [next] post would be Tsinan, in Shandong Province. We were the only officers. We were there for [only] about six months. When we arrived with our two little girls and their Chinese nurse, we found a large, lovely house with big gardens around it. (We grew a lot of our own vegetables.) [Thinking about that house] takes me back to what life was like when you had people to wait on you — which we don't any more! First, there was the gate man, who was a night watchman as well as gate man. There was a rickshaw coolie because we didn't have an automobile. There were two gardeners: there were about two acres of gardens to be cared for in the summer. In the winter, one took care of the furnace; the other one was free to repair furniture or build things for the children or do anything that we asked him to do. In the house, we had a number one boy, which would be the equivalent of a butler at home, and his son was the number two boy. The number two boy took care of the two children; he served them and the Chinese nurse we had brought up. Or, if we were having a party, he assisted his father. We had a cook who had a son that he was training as an assistant cook. We had an amah who was to take care of my laundry and the children's. We had a wash man who took care of my husband's clothes more than anything else — and the household linens. My husband had white suits that he changed sometimes twice a day in the hot weather. They were washed and ironed and put back in the closet. I realized when we arrived [back] in Washington that to have a white suit — trousers and vest and jacket — was a very expensive item. I should not forget that we also had a coolie — so you can imagine what a gathering!

We got to know the missionary group that ran Cheeloo University and hospital. There was a very small group of foreigners there — about thirty, I would guess. In addition to the mission group, there was a Japanese consul and his wife; and a German. Then there was the British-American Tobacco Company representative and his family. Standard Oil had a family. So we had a very pleasant time, and we took several extremely interesting trips; for example, we went up to the Sacred Mountains.

Then we got word that we could come back to the States for our leave. Horace knew Wilbur Carr quite well, and his secretary, Rebecca De Lashmund, had been a great friend of Horace's before we left for China. Mr. Carr had decided that men who'd been out in the field for a certain length of time should have a year at home, and that they could go to a university and study what they were particularly interested in.Well, Horace was particularly interested in the commercial end, so he was the first officer to get this assignment in the U.S. And he could pick his university, so he picked Harvard. We went up to Cambridge, taking a Chinese nurse with us whom we'd had in Canton. She was very anxious to come to the U.S., and her family apparently had money. She spoke English, and French with a slight Chinese accent. She paid her own way over and we just continued to pay her the same as we had in China. We got an apartment on Prescott Street in Cambridge. We were there for a whole year, 1936-37.

Then the Japanese war broke out in China and they wanted Horace back. He was doing so well in his studies that Harvard wanted him to take another year, but that wasn't possible. So he returned to China, taking the Chinese nurse with him because she had permission to stay in the U.S. for only one year. So I went down to Washington, my mother was living there. We took an apartment in Georgetown — the one that's just been all done over on the corner of 30th and Q Streets. The apartment was on the third floor. The State Department wouldn't let me go back [to China]. The families who'd been in Shanghai were sent to the Philippines, and they returned to Shanghai as soon as it was safe. But to the people who were at home they said, “Well, they're at home, let them stay there.”

So I didn't get back until the spring of '38. Mrs. Lockhart was on board, Caroline Service, with her two children, and then a man that we had known with the British-American Tobacco Company, who was a bachelor, was on board. And then Marselis Parsons, an FSO just going out to India. (He now lives up in New Hampshire just north of Hanover, and I live just south of Hanover. So after 25 years we met at a party and you can imagine our amazement).

Anyway, there were very few passengers — only about seven first-class passengers; we were all tourists. The children got along all right. We were met in Shanghai by our husbands. We had two years there. We were surrounded by Japanese. That was when they had bombed everything all around and it wasn't safe to go out into the country, but living in Shanghai was like living in a European city. There were all nationalities and many had been able to come in, you see. We had the Columbia Club, we could go out there and play tennis. I was no tennis player but I thought this was a wonderful chance, now I'll take some lessons.

At that time there was an enormous number of refugees from Europe who had come in — the Jewish group fleeing Europe had fled from Austria. There was this man who was a tennis “pro” and I said I'd like to have some lessons with him. Well, I'm not a tennis player, obviously, and right in the middle of one of these games after he had been instructing me, he came over to the net, jumped about two feet in the air, threw his racquet on the ground, and he shook his fist and said, “Never! Ten years I've been teaching. Never before have I failed to teach tennis.” Probably my mouth dropped open, and that was my last tennis lesson. I went in for bowling after that.

But we had a wonderful international time in Shanghai.

Q: Did that include the Chinese then, or were they .. ?

LITTLE: No, Canton was the only place that we really got to know the Chinese and we had some very good Chinese friends. But Shanghai was so large and on such an international scale. It was sort of like when we were in Peking, only on a much bigger scale.

Q-Squire:When you left Shanghai, did you and Horace leave together?

LITTLE: I went ahead of him on the Coolidge with the children. He had studied judo in college and had these mats that they do all their exercises on. On the way home, he stopped in Hawaii for three weeks and got his Black Belt from a Japanese who was willing to teach foreigners. When Horace got his Black Belt, there were only twenty-eight foreigners who had Black Belts. Later, when he was interned in Shanghai, he had a little gold Buddha that he wore, and when the Japanese saw that, they gave him all kinds of special privileges, because they knew there were only a few foreigners who had Black Belts.

When we were in Peking, there was a traveling group of Chinese acrobats that came, and if he didn't get right in and work with them! I've got marvelous pictures of him in the middle of this group of Chinese - whatever they were. He was so strong! Horace could bend nails. He was really amazing! A Russian who wanted to get into the United States came into the consulate in Canton. He was a strong man who wanted to perform in the United States, and he said, “I've never met somebody who wasn't a professional that has the strength that he has.”

When I left Shanghai in 1940, it was the end of my China career. [Horace] returned from internment on the Gripsholm.

Q: What year was that? That was [1942] was it not?

LITTLE: It was the first trip of the Gripsholm. L.K. Little was on the same ship. I think the Conte Verde was the first ship they were on. They went to Louren#o Marques in Africa and got the Gripsholm to New York.

But we never lost track of the people that we met in this small community, the Americans. We never really lost track of them because it was such a concentrated ...

Q: Experience?

LITTLE: ... and there were not very many. Even when we moved from one station to another and from one post to another, we still had contact. It was so different from Europe — entirely different, because there you moved from one country to another.

Q: Did you find, for example, that the European diplomatic service was rather the same? Did you encounter in various places the same people within China?

LITTLE: Yes we did. They would be moved around, too. Small groups. There was a Swedish couple, the English, and different ones. For instance, up in Tsinan, we found a couple we had known in Canton. In fact, she gave me a Chinese pin that had been part of a napkin holder and she had it made into pins. And there was the Chinese character for “good luck” of silver. And I was leaving Tsinan and I admired it; she was wearing it. She took it right off and gave it to me. And it's one of my favorite possessions. Now, that's a good many years ago. She said, “Oh I've been trying to think what to give you when you left.”

So it was absolutely delightful. You could entertain, you never had to plan anything, all you had to do was tell the servants how many people were coming.

My second husband I first met in Canton. He was there as Commissioner of Customs. Of course Shamien was a very small community. You got to know people very well. I met his mother when she came out and his daughter and son. He had these lovely Customs

boats that we could take trips on the river in. We went out for the Dragon Boat festivals. We went for all sorts of Chinese parties and we knew a good many of the Chinese officials and would be entertained by them. Usually in restaurants. Once in a while, we were entertained in the residence, at home. They would come and enjoy being with us.

It was a life that's gone, gone forever, it will never be the way it was then. Even with what hardships there were. We had practically no hardships because we were not under fire at any time. Of course the people who were interned — there was a newspaper man, his last name was Powell; he was in Shanghai when we were there later. Later he was held in prison and I think he lost both his feet.

On the trip that we took through the interior [from Canton to Yunnan Fu], we met a group of Swiss missionaries. We were going in a southern direction, and they were going north. The day after they left the mission, they were captured by bandits. The women were allowed to go free, but the men were kept for about eighteen months. They were carried on poles, their hands and feet tied. Oh, they suffered terribly.

The Swiss did not have extraterritoriality like the British and the French and ourselves. That meant that we had our own courts and our own judges. (Judge Helmick was the American judge in Shanghai.) If we got into any trouble, we could call on our government to help us out, but the Swiss were not in that position. I know that the two wives came to Canton pleading — was there anything that we could do to get their husbands freed. We told them that there really wasn't, but we heard later that they finally — you see, the missionaries would not give any ransom money — worked around it and said they paid the bandits for the care they had given [the men]. And the care! I know they were months in the hospital when they were finally freed.

Of course that's all been done away with. When we were there, we were under the jurisdiction of the American courts. And other nations had the same privilege. And the Chinese of course didn't like it. I don't blame them — in their own country.

Q: You have spoken from time to time about living in Canton on Shamien Island. Would you talk a little bit more about the island itself — what it looked like, what the consulate building was like, where you lived?

LITTLE: I'd be very glad to do that. Shamien is like a small, modern city on an oblong island off the city of Canton, where all the foreign businesses and banks had their headquarters. There were two concessions, as they called them, the French concession and the British, and the American consulate general was in the French concession, also the consul general's residence. The British consulate general buildings were located on the island, also the very attractive Episcopal (Church of England) Church, and the Canton Club, where we all congregated. It had an indoor swimming pool. There was even a small hotel, the Victoria Hotel, that faced the China mainland across a little canal. The canal had two bridges, one that went over from the French side to the mainland and the other from the British.

The big businesses — Standard Oil, British-American Tobacco Company and so on — had their own buildings, all the offices being on the first floor, living quarters above. The National City Bank was the American bank, and we had many parties upstairs over that bank. Very attractive people were in charge. The Commissioner of the Chinese Customs Service had his residence on the island, even though he was employed by the Chinese government. It was always a foreigner who was at the head of that.

There was a center street that had houses built on both sides. The houses were of stone and cement. You might as well have been living in a small city in the United States — it was that similar. The British had a bowling lawn in front of their consulate, and there were tennis courts in front of the American consulate. There were park-like spaces along the front of the island facing the river, and we could easily walk from one end of the island to the other. There was no transportation on the island. I don't believe we had any rickshaws there, as in Peking. We would go by foot across the canal and pick up a rickshaw [on the mainland] if we wanted to do any shopping in town. The servants did all the [food]

shopping for us, of course. The house servants lived there, but no Chinese were allowed to live on the island, except those that were employed by the foreigners.

There was always plenty to look at from Shamien with the ships going down in front of us — those big junks with their big sails. The canal on the mainland side of the island was full of little sampans where everybody cooked and lived. The babies would be tied on them with ropes to keep them from falling in, or, if they fell in, they could be pulled out. I thought the most interesting boats we watched were the rice boats as they called them. To earn their way from one port to the next, they had to walk. There was a wheel at the stern, and the coolies would get on and walk on the wheel, to make it go. The only power was manpower. There was loads of that everywhere!

Of course, women in the south did not bind their feet. It was the Manchu women, in the north, whose feet were bound. So the women we saw all worked just as the men did, as coolies. And outside of the city itself, the women worked in the rice paddies, and so forth. Sometimes you saw them hitched up along with a water buffalo, as a team. As far as I could see, the men let the women do all the work (laughs).

We went ashore, quite often, for Chinese dinners. This was the one part of China in which we got to know a great many Chinese. Many of them were returned students, from Europe or the United States. And I think there were a great many who had gone to universities in the central part of the U.S. There was a club for the overseas Chinese, where they would have dances, and they'd dress and dance exactly as we did. But we did have some very interesting typically Chinese affairs. One was a wedding of a very wealthy Chinese couple who were going to the U.S. to study but who had a typically Chinese wedding. The gifts consisted of lengths of silk that would make up a garment. They hung from the walls as decoration. We went in a car (I guess) to this party, and as we came into the front hall, an orchestra was banging away, and each guest who came in was given a fanfare (laughs).

We were shown all around the building, which was very large with many courtyards and areas. The father was a very prominent Chinese and he had many concubines. The young couple were to have a room in part of this big section. The few Chinese houses that we saw were like this, having a number of courtyards in which each concubine had her entourage.

We also went to a funeral. A terrible strain — a young couple had to watch by the coffin, each in turn, for so many days, while guests came in to pay their respects to the departed. The two young people had both been to the U.S. The husband was a lawyer. The girl had never been in China and had grown up completely Americanized. To be suddenly put into this family that had half a dozen concubines. This one concubine had no son, so the son of another one had to take the place of a son that she might have had. So they had all this responsibility. She said, “I don't know whether I can stand it or not.” But she did. Of course she spoke perfect English, and we got to know them very well.

But it was interesting that these returning young men who had studied in Europe or in America, and who had studied law in different places, were evidence of the fact that rules of law of course vary in different countries. So to have them all combine together in Canton — it was a very interesting place.

There were a few business people who did live on the mainland. And then there was Lingnan University, located in Canton proper — a big mission thing, with most interesting people running it — educated and very intelligent. Dr. Henry was head of it when we were there. During the time we were in Canton, the University had a very interesting arrangement. There were a group of Chinese students who were studying in the United States; they were to study for one year in one of the middle western universities. There were fifteen American girls and boys who came over to study at Lingnan. What interested me so much was that of these young people who came, there were at least twelve of them that had red hair — or almost red hair!I thought it was most unusual to think that there

were the children who had decided they wanted to study in China; they were of course of great interest to the Chinese who were all of the same coloring, the same dark hair.

I'd like to describe our living quarters. At first we lived in an apartment over an office that had nothing whatever to do with our consulate. Then we moved into the consulate building, a cement building with a flat roof, with two apartments on the second floor, and the offices on the first floor. One of the two apartments was a small one, for the vice consul, a larger one for the consul. A really important consul had a whole floor to himself. The Bragoniers were on the floor with us. They were very enthusiastic about animals and they had a parrot. There was a porch all across the back, with a separation. But if you had a parrot or a dog or a puppy, you might as well have it in your own apartment, except that on the porch it didn't disturb your furniture. There was sometimes a, shall we say, slight friction over who and what. What really almost ruined us was that our neighbors took on one of Fred Waring's piano players in the extra room. He brought in his piano. That prompted the office to intervene, deciding that people who were not consular people couldn't occupy space in the building. Of course, the “miscreants” were a young couple who were just married and had just come out from the States, so they weren't familiar with what was acceptable.

We were four years in Canton, living in this apartment most of the time. It was a very comfortable apartment, and I had the two children there — I'd had the second baby when I was home. It was terribly hot; in the spring, very, very humid. In fact, water dripped off the walls, down onto the floors, which were cement. The men all had little wooden slats under their feet when sitting at their desks, to keep their feet dry at such times. Of course, this prevailed on the first floor; on the two upper floors, we didn't have this problem. But we did have to keep electric lights going in the closets to keep clothes from mildewing. They said that a lot of the consulate's papers had disintegrated in Canton, and there was another building beside the office building where we and the Consul General had our

apartments, in the block between. The shelves holding the records were all open. The papers disappeared like magic: white ants!

We had a very amusing experience. The temporary apartment we were in at first had a storeroom under the staircase. I had stored a number of things in this space under the steps. About three months passed before I went in to find something. I opened the door, looked around expecting to see books we had stored there, as well as the commissions that Horace had received each time he'd moved — like from language school to Vice Consul, then to Consul, and so on, signed by the Secretary of State and the President. We had just stacked one on top of another, in a frame with a glass over it and a wooden backing. Well! I picked it up, and thought, “What on earth is this?” The little bugs had eaten tiny pathways around the wood backing and there was no paper in it at all except way down in the right-hand corner. And there was Calvin Coolidge's name. We laughed so hard! Then we knew what they were — the three of them, the commissions he'd gotten, when he first went into the Service. Calvin Coolidge's name, we said, was the “only name the white ants couldn't stomach.” (laughs) That was the end of his first commissions, as well as books and all kinds of other things. So I learned. You learn by experience, and sometimes it's painful.

In the consul general's house — there were offices there — somebody walked across the floor and the chandelier came crashing down. The white ants, again. We really had a lot to cope with in regard to destruction of things. I recall another time, a couple were in bed and the ceiling came down on them. They weren't hurt, but you were on the lookout all the time for happenings like this.

But we lived very comfortably. There was a big Canton club and everybody belonged to that. There was also a bowling alley. Somebody had sent for American bowling balls, the big ones. So there were six of us who met and bowled every afternoon. There was a golf club on the mainland but if you didn't have a car you were sort of out of luck. The cars

of course had to be kept on the mainland with a chauffeur. I know the commissioner of customs had a car. I don't remember that our consul general had one.

When we first arrived, Mr. Ballantine, who had been in Japan, was our consul general. I was involved in a great many forms of entertaining. Mr. Ballantine was the first foreigner, an officer, who insisted that he would never give a dinner party or a party without including a certain number of Chinese. The British had entertained the Chinese but had never combined the foreign population of Shamien with them, or else it would be just men; it wasn't the social sort of affair we were accustomed to.But Mr. and Mrs. Ballantine always included Chinese guests. And the British noticed that the Americans were beginning to get quite a lot of influence that was disappearing from their sphere. So they also began including the Chinese too, before we left.

We had American gunboats out there. The Mindanao is the one I remember particularly. It gave us a great deal of entertainment because they had movies. We could go on board to movies and the officers would entertain there. They would also come in to the island. There were several gunboats, including a British, in Canton Harbor, near the Pearl River. The Customs had some lovely launches, and Memorial Day a group of us took a picnic lunch on the launch and went up to Whampoa, where the earliest Americans had been buried. We decorated the graves with little American flags and flowers. I don't think they lasted until we were out of sight before all the little Chinese children came tearing over and collected them.

Springs in Canton were full of water dripping off the sides of walls. Summers were very hot. On the flat roof of the consular office building where our apartment was, we had mat sheds built. Each one of us had a mat shed on the roof and we'd go up to sleep there at night, coming down by morning. That was more or less how we spent our summer holidays. In my case, my second baby was about a year old when summer arrived, still lying in a crib. The prickly heat that affected people with sensitive skins was so bad that a

German doctor advised me to take my children and get out of Canton and go to Baguio in the Philippines.

That's what we did. I took one of the President Line boats to Hong Kong, from there to Manila, then by train up to Baguio where there was an American military station. I was up there about two months. Within 24 hours after we arrived, the baby's skin healed. In Canton you would put powder over, plus everything that was given to me, by morning she would be just as badly off as before. So I spent one summer in Baguio.

Another summer, we went down for one month to an island where missionaries had a settlement, in the Hong Kong harbor. You could swim on the beach and it was a pleasant summer.

Q: You had spoken at various times, as have others who've been interviewed for this collection, about the feeling of esprit de corps that existed among those who served in China. Would you say that that esprit was partly because you were so far from home? Or do you think there were other reasons as well?

LITTLE: Well, I think that a good many of the men who stayed in China had the language. The idea was that you had to stay seven years if you accepted the language assignment. The language studies took two years and you did nothing else. So during that time you were of no earthly good to the Department until you'd finished your language course. Mandarin was spoken in north China and there was absolutely no resemblance between Mandarin and Cantonese. There were about 38 dialects in China. Even in Shanghai they couldn't understand us when we spoke Mandarin to the man on the street. I thought that it was discouraging that only Mandarin was taught. The written language was understood everywhere, and so was written Japanese. Mr. Ballantine, who came from Japan, could understand China's written language. All the Cantonese officials with whom we had contact spoke English. But the wives did not, so conversing with them fell on me. I had taken only a small amount of Mandarin but I'm great on sign language. The Chinese are

so kind — if they can't understand the least bit of what you're trying to say, they're polite, enthusiastic, and don't mind if you're using very poor Chinese. In my case, the minute a foreign woman who spoke the language was present, I would shut up like a clam because I didn't want her to hear what I was trying to get across to a Chinese.

They loved a chance to come to the house. They were interested in the way we served our meals. And our children fascinated them. The children's clothes, the beds they slept in, etc. So to entertain a wife who spoke not a word of English wasn't at all difficult. If I took her around, pointed out things, showed her things, she was just delighted. Meanwhile, Horace who had done all the studying was talking to a man who spoke perfect English and they were getting along beautifully. I told him, “You don't know how hard I had to work for a couple of hours while you were talking English!”

Q: But there was always in China somewhere people who had either studied with Horace Smith or served with him.

LITTLE: That's right. and it goes back to the fact that — we call ourselves “old China hands” — we didn't consider the Army and Navy who came for a few months “old China hands.” They did, but we didn't. Businesses like National City Bank, Chase Bank, Standard Oil, and all these companies had members who had studied the Chinese language; they spent their careers in China. I think that's probably why there was such a close bond among the Americans, both consulate and business community. So many of them had been there a long time. Also, the other legations (everything then was legations, no embassies) had a certain number of personnel who had been taught Chinese or expected to remain in China. That was the difference between your people assigned to Europe and other places.

The Paxtons: Hall Paxton and Anne were in Peking when we were there. We went from there to Canton. I don't know what their next post was but they came after we'd been in Canton for a while and were there after we left. We saw a lot of them there. When

we went to Shanghai, there they were again. That made three different [places], widely separated, where we ran into the same people. The Clubbs, Edmund and Mariann, were in Peking when we were. Hankow had been their first post, I believe. Then they ended up in Shanghai, where we saw them again.

Then there were business people whom we encountered again. For instance, the head of the Salt Gabelle which was very much like the Customs, was run by foreigners and an American headed it. They were moved to Shanghai; we saw them again there. National City Bank would send a man to Peking and then to Shanghai. I don't recall that Chase Bank had an office outside Shanghai. Then the British consul general in Canton was transferred to Shanghai and was there when we arrived.

Q: In other words, there was a group of people who were in China rather closely associated either for business or other reasons.

LITTLE: That's right.

Q: Who maintained contact with each other over a long period of time.

LITTLE: I don't remember meeting the National City Bank people anywhere else. We knew the head of the Peking branch; whether they were transferred or kept in that area, I don't know. It would be more difficult [to transfer staff] for business, I would think, than for consular staff.

Q: Did you know many missionary groups? Or individuals?

LITTLE: They didn't move very much. They had to study the dialect of the area, and once they'd studied that — we heard some awfully amusing stories about that. Some, of course, came out from home with just a glorious idea that they were going to change the heathen. One man went up river carrying a typewriter with him.One of the old China hands on board said he had his family with him; they were from Canada, I believe. The China hand asked

him, “What are you planning to do with your typewriter?” The reply was, “Oh, I'm going to type up messages.” The other then asked him, “Do you have any idea that the people you're going up to cannot even read their own language? How do you think they're going to read yours?” “Oh,” the missionary replied, “the Lord will show the way.” (laughs) This sort of thing happened every so often.

The missionaries who were most successful went out as doctors and teachers. They really made a great impact. And they were extremely attractive people. We met quite a number. They became experts in some particular field. For instance, one of the professors at Cheeloo University in Tsinan where we spent a short time became expert on bronzes. Over Christmas we had some people we'd met in Hong Kong, the Gibson Fahnstocks of the Pennsylvania Railroad who had a beautiful yacht that had been fashioned out of one of those great clippers that used to ply back and forth to China loaded with wood. They were voyaging up and down in China and would come up to Canton to join us. He was collecting bronzes. So we invited this professor to come to dinner while they were our guests.

In North China, typically, things for sale might be brought to your house; in Canton, you had to go out, to Blackwood Street or whatever. In Peking, you could just tell your boy you were interested in painting or something and the first thing you'd know there would be a man in your living room unrolling his treasures. So, of course, while the Fahnstocks were looking at bronzes, the Chinese merchant learned that an expert was coming to dinner. Suddenly, all the fake “bronzes” disappeared, leaving only one little tiny thing that had come out of a grave. The expert said, “I don't want to spoil things for the merchant, but I'll tell you honestly, these are not originals, they're copies. They're good, and they're old, but they're not the real thing. The real thing is almost impossible to get.” So the merchant returned with other things and the Fahnstocks bought several — some big urns with the rings and so on. The professor didn't want the sellers to feel terrible, but they knew he knew. (laughter)

I do think that in my case as far as the children were concerned, there were no problems at all. I had a perfectly wonderful, quite old amah for the one that was born in Peking. She had bound feet and she adored the baby, in fact she loved her so much that she would not go to the train when I had to leave Peking. She couldn't bear to say good-bye to her.

When I arrived in Canton, I was able to get another amah to take care of her and she was about a year-and-a-half old then. Later, when I had my second baby, first of all I interviewed a Chinese girl who had grown up in Australia. Her English would really have startled my family at home, if the children had learned to speak her particular sort of dialect English. Needless to say, I did not ask her to take the job.

But I was fortunate in finding a very nice, well cultivated Chinese girl who was also a practical nurse. She had been educated in Hong Kong and came from a good Chinese family, and she also learned to speak a little French as well as English. She was wonderful with the children, and we took her with us to north China when we left Canton. When we came back to the United States for a year at Harvard, we took her with us.

She taught the Calvert System to the children. We sent to Baltimore, and we got the books for the Calvert School and she used those. So the children were well-versed in English before we came back to Shanghai after we had had a year at home in the public school. They went to the Shanghai American School which was an excellent school and the graduates - of course they were so young they were not in that group - but the graduates went on to colleges all over the United States. So there was absolutely no problem where education [was concerned].

I should add that we had a Swiss/Russian governess also for them in Shanghai, and she was a most remarkable woman. She had fled Russia when the Bolsheviks took over their property. Her husband, or rather I should say her uncle, had been head of all the railroads under the Czar, and she showed us one night a photograph - it came out in Life or Time magazine, and showed her (uncle) with the Czar overlooking some of the railroads.

She also showed us at another time photographs of the family home which was as large as the White House and beautifully decorated, parquet floors, crystal chandeliers and excellent oil paintings. She said that she and her aunt escaped from that house and came to Shanghai with just a small handkerchief with jewels in it. And that was what they had had to live on.

I think [life in the Foreign Service] did a great deal for our children to get them to know other children and become interested in things that are going on. It never seemed to bother my children. They were girls, of course, and they never joined any groups that you had to do such and such to be accepted. I should say that later on my older daughter went to a private school in Brookline, Massachusetts, and it was a very close knit group of girls who had started in the lower grades and had always been together. And they were quite a small group, there were not more than ten or twelve, I believe, in the class, and they disliked intensely having any new person come in. My daughter said that her life was miserable. She didn't enjoy that school at all. It was the only place in all her wanderings and going to schools in different places that she found very unpleasant. So that doesn't speak well for the Boston atmosphere!

Community involvement? It's hard for me to say because it was such an international group of people and where we had the Chinese, they took part in whatever we were doing. Or else we took part in some of their activities. It is very hard to describe it as anything that people in Europe or in any other place might have had.

Representational entertaining was such fun and enjoyable when you had all the servants and you hardly had to plan the meals. If you wanted to, you could, but if you didn't want to, you would just say “There are going to be fifteen people for dinner.” I know that my second husband, who had lived in China from 1914 with the Customs Service, said that his boy would ask him if he wanted vanilla ice cream with chocolate sauce, or chocolate

ice cream. And he said that's all he ever had to say about maybe eighteen or twenty people for dinner.

I never thought we could really compare the Foreign Service and the corporate world because I don't think the higher salaries in the business world could make up for the interesting experiences that everyone who was the least bit interested in how other people lived, or in how to make themselves useful and effective with other groups, could possibly see that they would prefer the higher salaries in the business world. While ours were very small at the time, I think that the other “perks,” as they call them, that go with the Foreign Service, make up for a great deal.

One of the most difficult things about the Foreign Service is separating the families, because of terrorism or war, and the Foreign Service family is broken up. The husband stays on at his post [and] the family goes home. I know in our case the fact that we were separated as much as we were — finally the family just disintegrated. My husband went on and had a very successful career in other parts of the world, but after the 12 years we had [in China], we separated in a very amicable way. That is the most difficult thing I think, to be separated so that you can't be together. One person takes on the full responsibility of the family and it just didn't work out for us. I think for many people it probably does work out. In this day and age when there is so much separation between families, they seem to accept it.

Q-Squire: This is Wednesday, August 31st (1988), and I am in Cornish, New Hampshire, talking with Ruth Little, taking over from Hope Meyers.

You have said that Horace Smith was the youngest officer ever admitted to the Foreign Service. How old was he?

LITTLE: At that time he was the youngest one. At that time there were less than eight hundred officers in the consular and the diplomatic service. He was twenty-three, I guess.

Q-Squire:Did you and Horace talk about his work, or did you lead quite separate lives day by day?

LITTLE: We absolutely did not lead separate lives! I can remember that Horace never sent in a report. He had a habit of doing things at the last possible moment before the report was due. He would bring it up to the apartment. (This was in Canton, of course, because it was all study in Peking — we didn't have anything to do with reporting there.) We would sometimes be sitting up until two and three o'clock in the morning. I would be the critic. He would be reading his report, and I would say, “They're not imbeciles. They'll know what you're trying to say. Cut it down. Cut it out.”

Then later Mr. Sayre came out from Manila, and he had with him a fellow whom Horace had known. He said the only way [in Washington] they judged a report was by weight. He said that if you'd written enough and it weighed enough, they didn't even bother to read it.

Another amusing incident. The mayor of Canton gave an enormous dinner for Mr. Sayre — many Chinese officials and of course Mr. Sayre and his entourage. So the mayor gave this very nice speech and Mr. Sayre had a speech written out, and he replied. Later, when Mr. Sayre was traveling on to Manila, he happened to ask [Horace's friend]: “By the way, that was very interesting the way those two speeches coincided. The Chinese ... what he said ... and then what I replied. It all seemed to fit in perfectly.” The young man said, “Well, it should. Horace Smith wrote both of them.”

Q-Squire:Were you and the other wives interested in the political situation in China? Could you keep yourself abreast of the situation? Did you have newspapers, etc.?

LITTLE: There was a Hong Kong newspaper that we got, and we got magazines from home. But the political situation in China was so mixed up. Chiang Kai-shek was in control of Nanking and, as I've said earlier, when we were living in Peking, it was Chiang Kai-shek

who had bombs dropped on us in Peking. There were war lords all over the country and Chiang Kai-shek was only in control of the area around Shanghai and Nanking.

Q-Squire: [Do you remember] how other women — other wives — felt about living in China? Other narrators have commented that living in China wasn't everyone's cup of tea. Would you agree with that? [I understand] you knew of only one wife who was sufficiently unnerved by life in China that she had a breakdown and went home. Most wives loved the experience. Do you agree?

LITTLE: Yes, I do. That was in Peking, and this was a young married couple. I don't want to mention names, because she really went home in a straitjacket. She was completely confused. The climate in Peking — I know they talk about the dust storms, but I don't remember that that bothered me, but it was very high. I had nightmares, and I don't have [them] as a rule. Quite often I would wake up in the middle of the night, and I'd think that one of the cabinets on the wall was falling over on me. I'd be out in the middle of the room saying, “Oh-h, get it, get it!”My husband, finally, having done that two or three times, just said, “Oh, go on, get back to bed.”

Q-Squire: But it was unusual for it to happen?

LITTLE: It was unusual for me to have nightmares. But the climate — it's high like Mexico City — and in Johannesburg — it's very high plateau land, and there's something about the atmosphere — at least it affected me, and it affected this one girl very badly.

Q-Squire: You were really out there longer than any other wife or most wives.

LITTLE: Well, that's true. But of course the language officers did spend more time there. Ordinarily we would have had three or four years and then home leave, but because of the Depression, Horace was there seven years before he went home. And then he went to Harvard for a year in 1937.

Q-Squire: You did go back [after that] and were in Shanghai for two years.

LITTLE: That was like a big city in any place, all foreign buildings and so forth. The Japanese had bombed Shanghai, and that was the reason I couldn't go back [to China} with the children until they had settled things there. When we went back up the Yangtze [by boat] to where Shanghai was, we saw all the bombed-out buildings along the way. Along Suchow Creek there were an enormous number of refugees from Europe because of Hitler, also [because of] the Japanese. We had the German Jewish people who had been driven out of Austria (the ones who had escaped from Germany). It was an open port, Shanghai was, so people could come there. The American consulate general was absolutely flooded with requests to come to the U.S.

Q-Squire: Did you have Russians coming in — White Russians who had left Russia?

LITTLE: They had already come in when I went out. They had come earlier than that. We had a governess in Shanghai and she was a White Russian. Every vacant lot in the International Settlement had mat sheds and people living in them that had come in from the country. So many people had died, and there was no place to put them. Trucks would go around during the night and pick up the dead bodies that were lying on the street or had been put there. Also some of these places were renting beds for so many hours. They would put you out — throw you out — and re-rent the space to somebody else. It didn't disturb us. We lived on Route Culty in a very nice foreign-style house. I don't know, you get, it's awful to say, you get hardened, but it was the same way as when we first went to Peking. Those terrible smells, and the open sewers everywhere and those night-soil carts going through the streets. You just think, “Oh! I can't stand this. It's the most awful thing!” And then after a month, you go along and you don't pay any attention, no matter how bad it is. But also I have seen people lying dead on the streets, and we just walked around them. I said I'd never seen a dead person in a funeral home, but I've seen them lying dead

in the street. Someone [I know] said, “I think I'd rather see one lying in a casket!” I really ought to write a book!

Q-Squire: You mentioned the chit book.

LITTLE: Yes. Of course, not in Shanghai because Shanghai was just like a big city anywhere, and we had our own telephone. But in Peking and in Canton when we'd want to get in touch with a friend or give a dinner party, we would send a coolie with a little book with a note written in it. The person it was written to would sign the book and [make some reply]. This was particularly true in Canton, where we were for four years. The island was small enough so that you could walk all around it, and we didn't have rickshaws even, and we didn't have telephones except in the offices. So we would write a note and send it with a servant to the other person's house. I have my book here from Canton that is really intriguing because it has all the names of people I knew that I'd invited to my house or I was invited to theirs; and their handwriting. Of course my second husband was in Canton for two years. That's when I met him and also fell in love with him; but don't put that in your account! He had a beautiful big house and so did the consul general.

Q-Squire: What kinds of entertainment was provided at dinners in Peking and elsewhere?

LITTLE: In Canton, you could tell your servants that you wanted somebody to entertain after dinner. There was one man we had (I don't remember whether this was Shanghai or Canton) could make all kinds of animals out of straw - reeds - and it was fascinating to watch him. There was another man — this may have been in Peking — who was a noodle cutter. He would have a plate or a board, and he could do all kinds of things with his noodles. It was really very clever. Of course in Peking in the summer, we would go to the top of the Peking Hotel (that was an old hotel that is still there, I guess) and there was a man there, an old fellow, a magician, a sleight-of-hand expert. I know he'd end up turning a somersault and a bowl of gold fish on his head. He turned the somersault holding the bowl of gold fish between his knees, I guess. Lung dung. Lung dung. Iga lung dung.

That is what we called him. Those were his secret words. I haven't heard that since I left Peking!

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BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Foreign Service Spouse: Horace Smith

Spouse Entered Service:1929Left Service: Divorced from Horace Smith 1946

Status: Widow

Posts: (With Horace Smith) 1929-31Peking 1931-35Canton 1935-36Tsinan 1936-37Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1938-40Shanghai

Place and Date (optional) of birth: 1904, Rutland, Vermont

Maiden Name: Ruth StoddardParents:

Joseph Marvin Stoddard

Nellie Fletcher Dickerman (Stoddard)

Schools: Potomac School (now in McLean, Virginia), Parsons School of Design, New York, New York

Date and Place of Marriage: Washington, DC, 1929

Profession: Entrepreneur; interior decorator; real estate agent

Children:

Barbara Harrison Smith (Born Peking, China)

Deborah Anne Smith (Box Xenia, Ohio)

End of interview